

Written evidence submitted by Young Minds

19th June 2020

- 1.0) I am writing on behalf of YoungMinds to provide a written submission to your Committee's inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors. We welcome that your inquiry is considering the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on DCMS sectors. This response considers the long-term impact of the pandemic on the voluntary and community sector (VCSEs) and organisations that support young people with their mental health.
- 1.2) YoungMinds is the leading children and young people's mental health charity in the UK, and we put the experiences of children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do. This submission will draw on the insights and lived experiences of the children, young people, parents, carers and professionals that we work and wider research.
- 2.0) The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic is the biggest health crisis for generations, and it is having a devastating impact on the lives of people across the world. The measures that the UK Government is taking to address the crisis, including restrictions on movement and the closure of schools to most students, are necessary to save lives.
- 2.1) The pandemic is also a mental health risk. To investigate the impact that the crisis is having on young people's mental health, we surveyed 2,111 young people with a history of mental health needs¹. Whilst the restrictions on movement are necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19, the results show that the measures are having a significant impact on young people with existing mental health conditions.
- 2.2) The findings suggest that the coronavirus is having a negative impact on young people's mental health, with 83% of respondents agreeing that the pandemic was making their mental health worse. The key factors that young people said had affected their mental health were concerns about their family, school and university closures, loss of routine and loss of social connection.

¹ The survey was conducted between Friday 20th March, the day on which schools closed to most students and Wednesday 25th March, when further restrictive measures had been put in place. Full details can be found in the report: https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf

Furthermore, risk factors associated with mental health conditions, including domestic violence² and risk-taking behaviour such as increased alcohol consumption, are also increasing because of the pandemic.

- 2.3) During this time when we expect young people's mental health to be getting worse, our research suggests that not all young people who need to be receiving support for their mental health are doing so. We conducted a survey with 1,679 parents and carers³ to find out what impact the pandemic and the restrictions on movement were having on the mental health of the children and young people in their care. A significant issue for the respondents to our survey was the lack of mental health support that they were able to access.
- 2.4) Mental health problems in children and young people have been shown to have an impact across the life course on educational outcomes⁴, employment⁵ an ability to maintain relationships, the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours such as self-harm⁶ and a reduced life expectancy⁷. It is therefore imperative that young people are able to access early support for their mental health, to prevent their mental health needs from escalating.
- 3.0) Community and voluntary organisations play an integral role in supporting young people with their mental health. This may be by providing clinical therapies and counselling or wider mental health services, delivering programmes that are aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing, or increasing young people's access to information and resources about mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.1) VCSE organisations are facing particular challenges in response to the coronavirus crisis. Charity sector bodies have made initial estimates that there be a minimum reduction of £4.3bn of income in the first 12 weeks of lockdown, though the figure could be far higher⁸. Recently, Pro Bono

² <https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-sees-700-increase-in-website-visits/>

³ The survey took place between Thursday 9th April and to Monday 20th April. We will be publishing findings wider findings from the survey in due course.

⁴ Green H, McGinnity A, Meltzer H et al (2005) Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain, 2004. London: Office of National Statistics

⁵ Ormel J, Oerlemans AM, Raven D et al (2017) Functional outcomes of child and adolescent mental disorders. Current disorder most important but psychiatric history matters as well. *Psychological Medicine* 47:1271-1282

⁶ Nearly half of 17-19 year olds with a diagnosable mental health disorder has self-harmed or attempted suicide at some point. NHS Digital (2018) 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017' Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017>

⁷ Hayes JF, Marston L, Walters K et al (2017) Mortality gap for people with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia: UK-based cohort study 2000-2014. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 211(3):175-181

Economics predicted that the charity sector faces a £10.1bn funding shortfall over the next six months as a result of Covid-19 - expecting sector-wide income to drop by £6.7bn at the same time as demand for services rises by the equivalent of £3.4bn⁹.

- 3.2) Similarly, in research by the Institute of Fundraising, 43% of charities surveyed reported an increase in demand for their services but a decrease in 31% for their total income (against their total income from the previous year)¹⁰. In some areas, this had already led to the closure of local community organisations that provide mental health support for young people at the local level. Therefore, many young people are being left, and will continue to be left, without the appropriate support for their mental health. The Government must take urgent action to invest in support for young people and their mental health.
- 4.0) Youth services play a crucial role in intervening early and supporting young people with emerging mental health needs with their mental health. Additionally, youth organisations provide protective factors that help young people to build the resilience that is needed to help them overcome life's obstacles¹¹. The financial pressures on VCSE organisations are likely to lead to a reduction in the support available to young people including those that support vulnerable young people with issues such as drug or alcohol abuse and domestic violence.
- 4.1) According to research by the YMCA on spending on youth services in England and Wales has been cut by 70% in real terms in less than a decade¹², with the loss of £1bn of investment which has resulted in the loss of 750 youth centres and more than 4,500 youth workers. This reduction in spending is expected to be exacerbated by the economic impacts of COVID-19. A recent survey by UK Youth estimates that nearly a third of youth organisations and clubs face closure by the end of the year if current Covid-19 restrictions remain in place. It is, therefore, concerning that we have seen the closure of many youth centres across the country in recent years. In practice, this means that many of

⁸ <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/2748-every-day-counts-as-charities-still-wait-for-government-support>

⁹ <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-face-10-billion-funding-gap-over-the-next-six-months-due-to-covid-19.html#sthash.T4f27cx1.dpuf>

¹⁰ <https://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk/news/coronavirus-impact-survey-results-charities-cannot-meet-the/>

¹¹ <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Out-of-Sight-COVID-19-report-Web-version.pdf>

¹² <https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>

the spaces where young people at risk can talk to a trusted adult and access early support may not be available in future are much more difficult to access.

- 5.0) VCSEs also play an important role in supporting BAME communities, who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they also face additional barriers to accessing NHS services. Young Black people frequently find themselves labelled by officials and professionals as being 'hard to reach' or 'marginalised'. Furthermore, research suggests that many young Black men feel that they will be treated differently by mental health services based on colour or race¹³.
- 5.1) The cultural understanding of mental ill-health can vary between ethnic communities. Equally, stigma can be felt strongly within some BAME families and communities. This can act as a significant barrier to seeking support from GPs or specialist mental health services. The fear, stigma and shame associated with mental ill-health and childhood adversity in some BAME communities can lead parents to actively avoid interactions with mental health services to circumvent a diagnosis and possible exclusion from community life¹⁴.
- 5.2) There are an estimated 9,000-10,000 BAME charities & community groups operating nationally. Many of these are small organisations with an average turnover of less than £10k annually. Research by the Ubele Initiative¹⁵ finds that nine out of 10 BAME micro and small organisations are set to close if the crisis continues beyond three months following the lockdown. More funding needs to be available to support the sustainability of BAME VCSEs in their response to the pandemic and beyond. Therefore, we support Charity So White's recommendation to ensure ring-fenced funding is available for BAME VCS Groups, managed directly by BAME Infrastructure organisations¹⁶.
- 6.0) We welcome the steps that the Government has already taken to assist these sectors, including a total of £9.2 million specifically for organisations providing mental health support, and £750 million for VCSE sectors. However, this falls well short of meeting the scale of need. While many voluntary sector providers have been quick to adapt to the changing landscape by moving support online and using innovative approaches to safe service delivery, there remain

¹³https://www.42ndstreet.org.uk/uploads/1/3/0/7/130794105/42nd_street_we_tell_you_report_december_2017.pdf

¹⁴ For more information about this, please see Addressing Adversity ebook (YoungMinds, 2018). Chapter 14. Responding to the traumatic impact of racial prejudice. Available at: <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/2715/ym-addressing-adversity-book-web-2.pdf>

¹⁵<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f9e592440243412051314a/t/5eaab6e972a49d5a320cf3af/1588246258540/REPORT+Impact+of+COVID19+on+the+BAME+Community+and+voluntary+sector%2C+30+April+2020.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://charitysowhite.org/press/open-letter-relief-packages-for-the-charitable-sector>

gaps in infrastructure and funding which threaten the long term sustainability of these efforts. This may leave many young people unsupported with their mental health and a wide range of other needs.

- 6.1) Young people's mental health services were already overstretched before the pandemic. Given the amount of young people that are experiencing a disruption in their care during the lockdown and the expected increase in young people with emerging mental health conditions, it is likely that services will be overwhelmed by the numbers of young people that are looking for support as we transition back to normal life. It is clear that to meet the needs of young people as we recover from the vast economic and social repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need a new and systematic approach to mental health support. This must strengthen mental health support and prioritise early intervention in our communities.
- 6.2) Because of this, our Beyond Tomorrow campaign¹⁷ is calling for the Government to take urgent action to make sure that, as we emerge from this pandemic, all young people can get the help they need when they need it. We recommend that the following steps are taken to support the sustainability of the VCSE and youth sectors in supporting young people with their mental health.

1. Ensure that all young people and families who need immediate mental health support can get it, to prevent the pandemic from having long-term consequences for young people's mental health.

- **Offer an immediate financial emergency support package to increase young people's access to mental health support** throughout the pandemic, through youth groups, charities and helplines. This will ensure that the organisations have the resources to support young people with their mental health throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Ensure that ringfenced funding is available for BAME community organisations.**
- **Launch a national campaign to reach 10 million children and young people to promote positive approaches for maintaining mental wellbeing,** during the pandemic and as restrictions are lifted, working alongside the voluntary sector to do so. This should be co-produced with young people with lived experience of mental health problems.

¹⁷ <https://youngminds.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/beyond-tomorrow/>

- **Ensure that clear guidance is made available to young people, families and professionals** about how young people can access local mental health services during the pandemic. This should include ensuring that services that are running are well publicised to young people and their support networks.

2. Help schools and professionals to support young people with their mental health during the pandemic and as we emerge from it.

- **Deliver a wellbeing support package for schools**, enabling them to support young people while restrictions are in place and providing guidance and resources for schools on how to manage transitions and implications as students return to school. This could include:
- **Circulate best practice guidance to mental health professionals across all sectors**, to enable them to provide safe and effective remote support to young people. This should include information about how to reach young people for whom digital technology is not accessible.
- **Raise awareness of the impact of childhood trauma and adversity through guidance for the young people's workforce** to help young people manage any trauma or symptoms of traumatic stress resulting from or exacerbated by the pandemic.

3. Commit to introducing additional support for young people's mental health beyond the pandemic to tackle the anticipated rise in mental health needs.

- **Create an action plan to support the growth and continuity of support as restrictions begin to lift**, alongside a contingency plan in case further restrictions are introduced in future.
- **Invest in culturally appropriate services and support**, ensuring that services collaborate with local communities, professionals are aware of the traumatic impact of racial prejudice and are aware of the impact of shame and stigma on young people from different communities.
- **Prioritise early intervention services in local communities**, including a network of open access Mental Health Hubs to provide support to those with emerging needs, alongside advice on employment, housing and education.
- **Launch a cross-government strategy for young people's mental health, taking a 'young people's wellbeing in all policies' approach** to future policy-making.
- **Introduce a national commitment to address childhood adversity and trauma**, with dedicated training for professionals who work with children and young people.